

Case Narratives – What category? What additional information would you like?

CASE 1 – HARLON

You're a 54-year-old divorced man. You live alone. You went to the emergency room 2 days ago with a severe headache, very high blood pressure, and a few hours of difficulty speaking. You were diagnosed with a transient ischemic attack (TIA – a near stroke). You are in the clinic today for follow-up of your blood pressure and neurologic status.

You work seasonal construction jobs. Over the past few years, jobs have been more and more difficult to find. For the last 2 months, you haven't been able to find work at all. You've been angry that project foremen have not selected you for various recent opportunities. Over the past year, you have been involved in a few minor safety-related incidents, but you feel that they weren't your fault.

You've enjoyed beer since you were 16. You've tried a variety of drugs but haven't used any for at least 20 years. Typically, you drink on Friday and Saturday nights with friends at your favorite bar– usually 4 to 8 beers. You often have a 6-pack on Sundays watching games at the bar. When you're working, you only have a couple of beers on weekday evenings. When you're not working, you have 3 or 4 beers on weekdays.

You've been divorced for 5 years. Your ex-wife and kids used to complain about your drinking a lot. The "last straw" leading to the divorce occurred when you crashed the car and got a DWI, causing you and your daughter various injuries which took months to heal. Since living separately from your ex-wife and kids, life is much better. You all get together for family occasions and dinners once or twice a month, and you never drink at those events.

Your biggest stressor lately is money. If you can't find work, you're not sure how you're going to pay your rent next month. You were surprised when you were asked last week to settle up your bar tab for the past month. It was \$600, much more than you can afford.

The emergency room doctor expressed concern about your drinking. Your blood tests showed an inflamed liver. The doctor said that the amount of alcohol it takes to irritate your liver also raises blood pressure and increases risk for a heart attack and a stroke, which could leave you permanently unable to speak.

You've already been thinking about cutting down. Given your medical issues and financial stress, you're ready to cut down quite a bit.

Alcohol and drug use – quantity and frequency: _____

Negative consequences: _____

Dependence symptoms: _____

CASE 2 – ALICE

You're a 25-year-old single, healthy woman. You've had trouble with depression off and on, but for the past two years you've been fine on a steady dose of medication. You've been working as a receptionist at a local doctor's office since graduating from high school, and you're a highly valued employee.

It's difficult for you to make friends. You've always lived with your single mom, who is your best friend. For the past 2 months, you've been in a relationship for the first time – with a co-worker, Jim. You and Jim enjoy experimenting with drink recipes. You typically have 2 or 3 cocktails twice a week at his place. Each cocktail contains 2 or 3 shots, so you have at least 4 to 6 shots per night.

James has been very nice to pick you up and drive you home. You realize that James probably shouldn't have driven a few times. But lately that's no longer a problem, as you're starting to stay overnight at his place.

You enjoy the buzz and the romance around drinking. However, you have felt guilty, because when you've been intoxicated you haven't taken the precautions you and your mom discussed to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. You believe that James is too nice of a guy to have an infection, but you would be very distraught if you got pregnant. You certainly do not want to have a child.

Alcohol and drug use – quantity and frequency: _____

Negative consequences: _____

Dependence symptoms: _____

CASE 3 – IZAIAH

You are a 22-year-old single man. You went to the ER last weekend for worsening asthma. You are at the clinic today because you are not much better.

You are on probation for petty larceny. You dropped out of high school at age 16. Your mother kicked you out of the house soon after that, but she keeps tabs on you, helps you out of legal jams, helps you find jobs, and occasionally gives you money. You have had sporadic employment at car washes, warehouses, and moving companies. You live with 3 friends in similar circumstances.

You've been in trouble with the law off and on since age 14. You have had numerous arrests for various misdemeanors, including shoplifting, disturbing the peace, and possession of illicit drugs. You have had 3 stays in jail, from a few days to one month. Most recently, you were caught stealing some merchandise from a warehouse where you were working, and you lost your job. You feel lucky that your employer is not pressing charges.

You've tried most drugs but have never injected. You especially enjoy snorting cocaine and then relaxing with marijuana. However, because of the expense, you often have cheap beer or whiskey instead.

You are sad that you are once again unemployed. You approached your mom for money, and this time she turned you down. You would like to find a more permanent job, and you strongly desire to avoid jail. You would consider reducing your drug use to avoid jail and get a better job.

Alcohol and drug use – quantity and frequency: _____

Negative consequences: _____

Dependence symptoms: _____

CASE 4 – BETTY – FOR THE PATIENT – 4/17/23

You're a 35-year-old woman. Last night you were very intoxicated and got in a bar fight. Today you are seeking care for your injuries – various bruises, chest pain when you take a deep, and a headache.

You and your husband, Bill, are construction workers. You and Bill like to work hard and party hard, and you've intentionally not had children. Your work is seasonal, and you enjoy taking extended vacations camping, hunting, and fishing.

You've enjoyed beer and whiskey since you were 16. You tried a variety of drugs but haven't used any for at least 10 years. Typically, you and Bill drink on Friday and Saturday nights with friends at bars. You usually have 4 to 6 beers and 2 to 4 shots of whiskey. And you have 2 to 3 12-ounce beers during the week, but more on "thirsty Thursdays."

You've gotten into a few fights in bars with minor injuries requiring stitches. You were arrested only once. You've had 2 DWIs when Bill was too drunk to drive home. You're much more worried about Bill's drinking than yours. He increasingly is unable to work on Mondays and Fridays, whereas you miss work only once a month or so. Bill gets shaky on most mornings, but that never happened to you. You've tried to set limits for yourself of no more than 6 drinks but that usually doesn't work out. Occasionally you'll have a Bloody Mary on weekend mornings to help yourself over a hangover. Quite a few of your family members have had alcoholism, but you don't drink nearly as much as they did.

While you enjoy your party life, you've been thinking for a few months that things are getting out of hand. The hangovers are awful. You don't have the energy you used to have, and you feel you're getting too old to keep up your party lifestyle. And you and Bill have been spending more, working less, and burning through a lot of savings.

Alcohol and drug use – quantity and frequency: _____

Negative consequences: _____

Dependence symptoms: _____

CASE 5 – ELANA

You're a 44-year-old, single mother and a long-time assistant chef at various restaurants, seeking a refill of your antidepressants. You've been extremely stressed since a year ago, when your oldest daughter, Maria, was diagnosed with lymphoma. Maria moved back in with you while she was getting chemo, and you've been caring ever since for her two children – Allie, age 4, and Bonita, age 3. Maria died 6 months ago. You've been treated for depression with medication and counseling, but you're still more down than up. Nevertheless, you've been able to juggle work and the kids pretty well.

A few months ago, when you couldn't sleep, you took one of Maria's leftover pain pills – Vicodin. Since then, you've taken Vicodin regularly for sleep and stress – usually 2 tablets after work and 2 tablets before bedtime. There was only one downside – you slept so soundly one night that you didn't hear when Bonita was sick until Allie woke you. You never drink alcohol or use any other drugs.

In the past, you have had very little alcohol, because you don't like the taste, and because you were repulsed by your father and some of his brothers, who you believe were alcoholics. You have never tried any illicit drugs.

You have had no idea that Vicodin could be addictive. If told that Vicodin could be addictive, you would certainly stop, because you certainly would not want to follow in your father's and uncles' footsteps. If you are not told that Vicodin is addictive, you might instead cut back to one tablet at bedtime, so you don't sleep so heavily.

Alcohol and drug use – quantity and frequency: _____

Negative consequences: _____

Dependence symptoms: _____